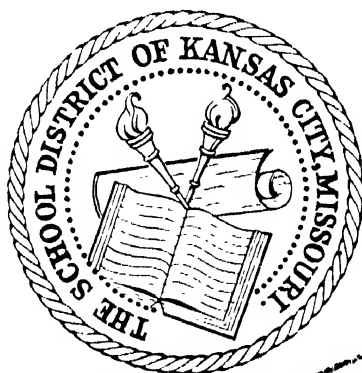


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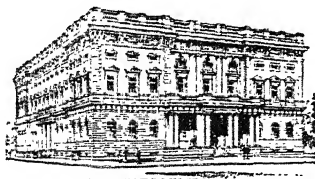
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A SERIES OF ILLUSTRATED
MONOGRAPHS: ISSUED MONTHLY

PART 31

JULY, 1902

VOLUME 3

Paul Potter

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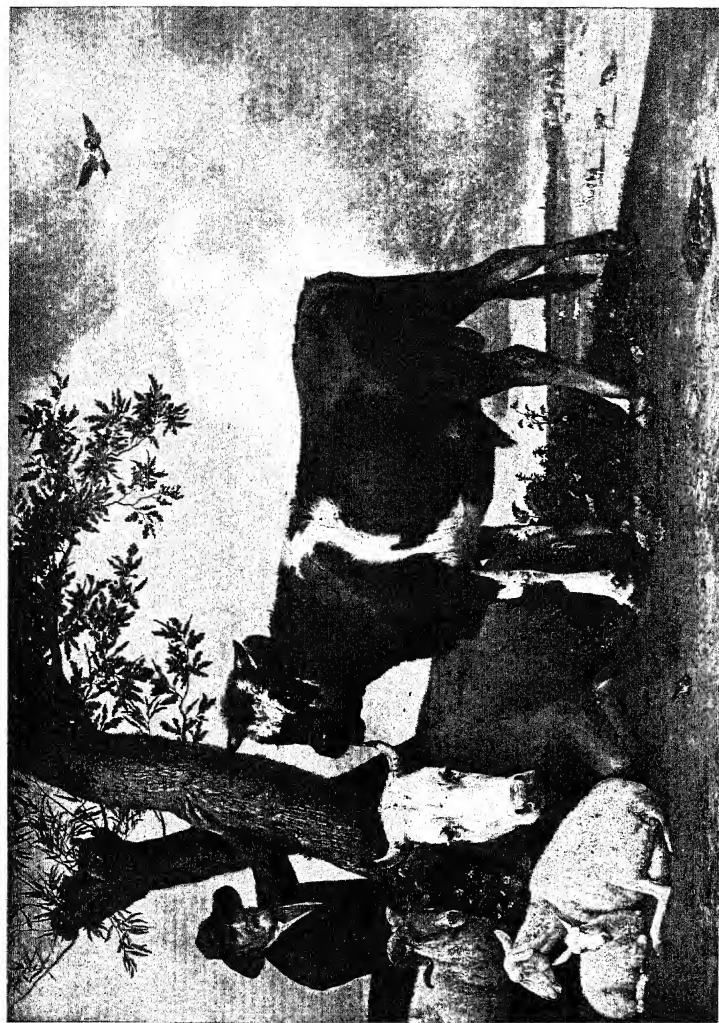
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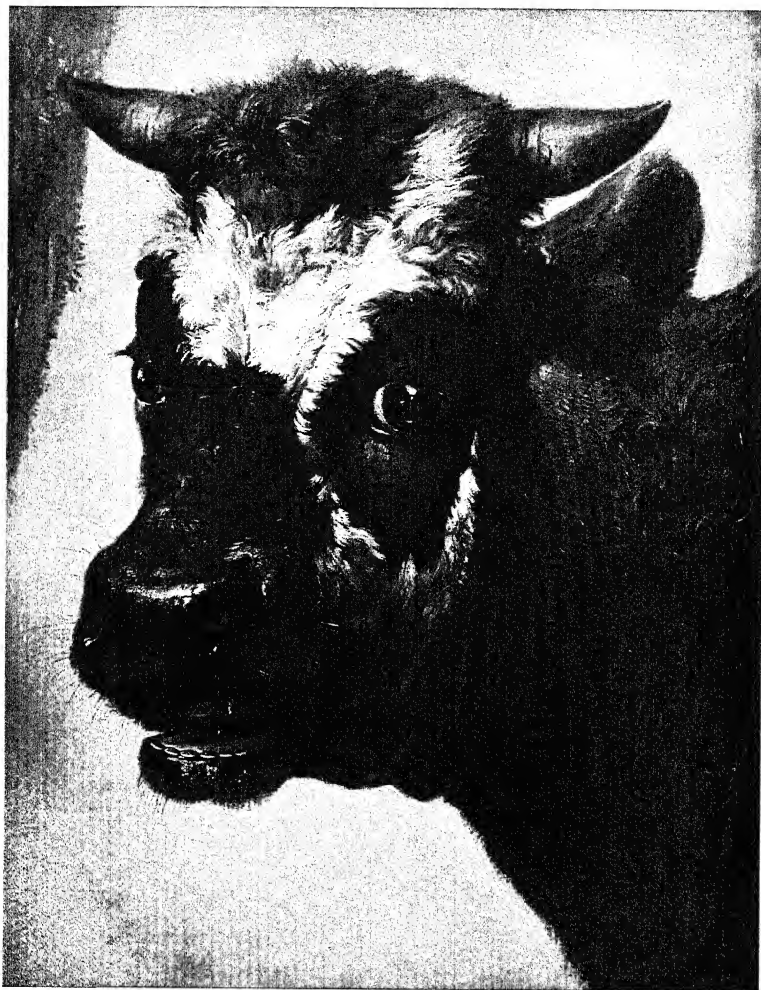
MASTERS IN ART

Paul Potter

DUTCH SCHOOL



PAUL POTTER
THE YOUNG BULL
GALLERY OF THE HAGUE

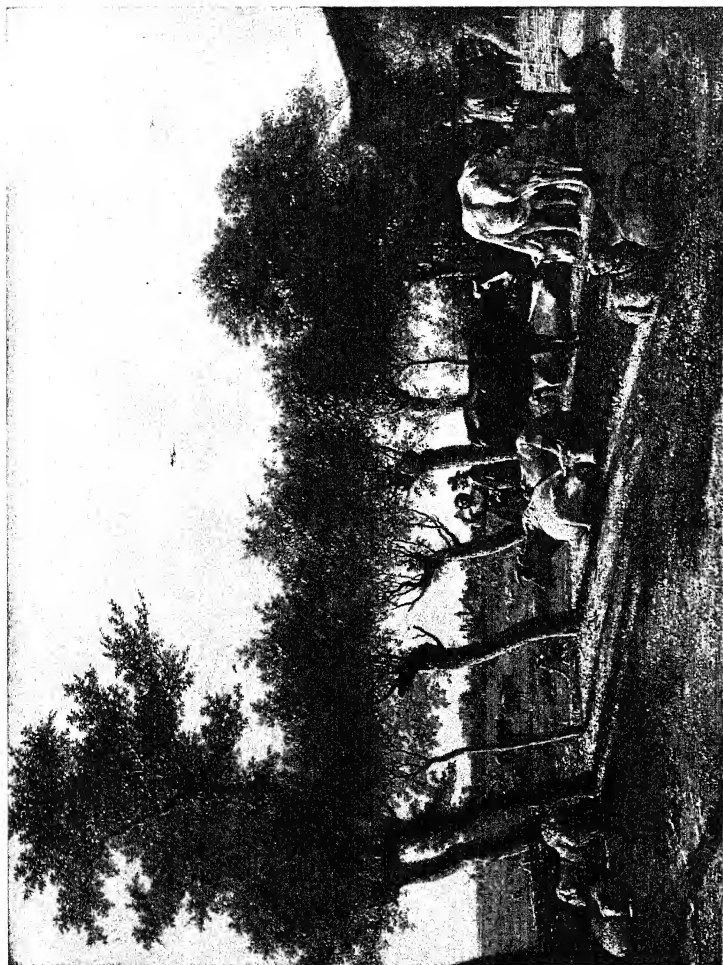


MASTERS IN ART PLATE II
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PAUL POTTER
THE YOUNG BULL [DETAIL]
GALLERY OF THE HAGUE



PAUL POTTER
ANIMALS IN A PASTURE
ROYAL GALLERY, DRESDEN



PAUL POTTER
DAIRY-FARM NEAR THE HAGUE
DORE OF WESTMINSTER'S COLLECTION, LONDON

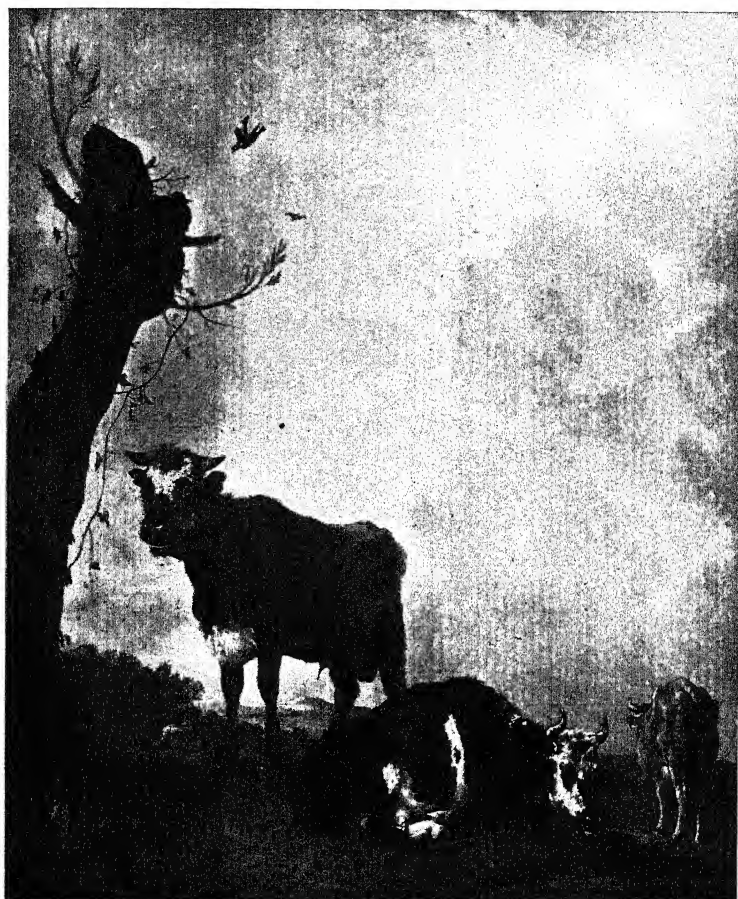


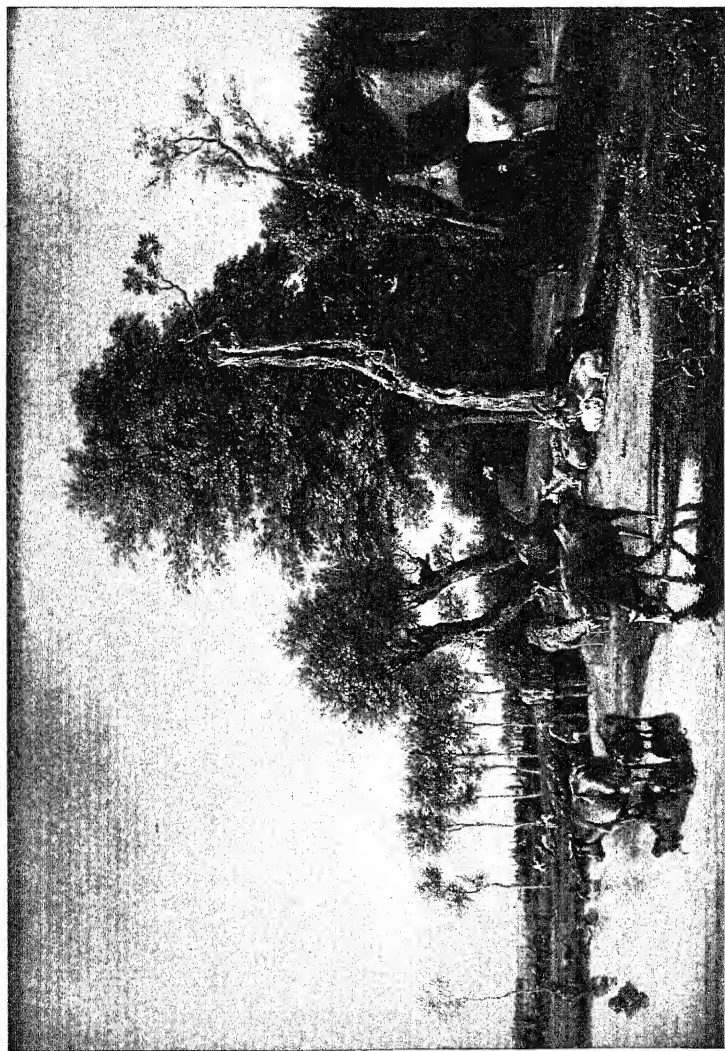
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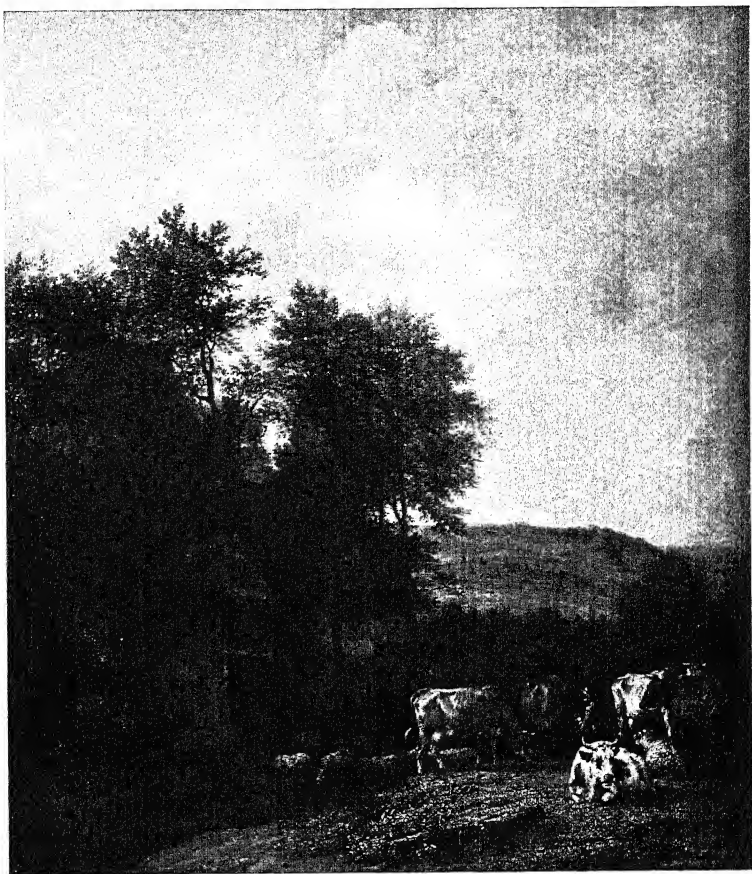
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LOUVRE, PARIS

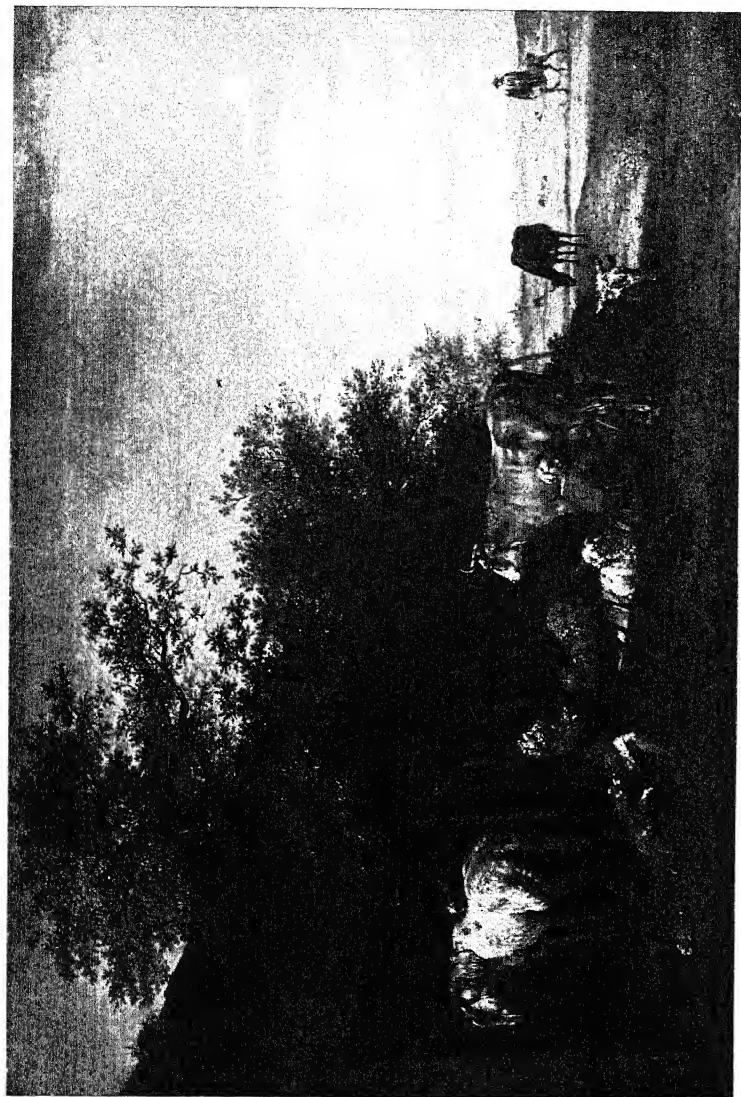
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PAUL POTTER
THE COW REFLECTED IN THE STREAM
GALLERY OF THE HAGUE





MASTERS IN ART. PLATE X
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PAUL POTTER
THE YOUNG THIRST
BUTCHINGHAM PALACE, LONDON



PORTRAIT OF PAUL POTTER

GALLERY OF THE HAGUE

This portrait was painted by Bartholomeus van der Helst in 1654, and as Potter died in January of that year it must have been completed but a few days before his death. It shows the young artist, clad in velvet, with palette and brushes in his hand, looking seriously over his shoulder at the spectator. His long hair is light auburn, his moustache delicate, his lips full and strong, and his expression sensitive and refined. The picture is a remarkable work, and it is evident that Van der Helst, though far from an emotional painter, must have been deeply moved by his model—the young and famous artist, who, at the height of his fame, was dying.

Paul Potter

BORN 1625: DIED 1654

DUTCH SCHOOL

FRANK CUNDALL

‘LANDSCAPE AND PASTORAL PAINTERS OF HOLLAND’

PAUL POTTER, one of the most successful in his lifetime of any of the Dutch painters, was born at Enkhuizen, in November, 1625. He was christened, on the twentieth of the month, after his maternal grandfather, Pauwels, another form of Paulus; but he uniformly adopted the latter version in his signature. His early studies were directed by his father at Amsterdam, and by Jacob de Weth at Haarlem, as is proved by the latter's entry in his sketch-book: "In the year 1642 P. Potter came to me to learn painting for eight pounds a year." But such, however, were his natural gifts that at the age of fifteen he was, we are told, recognized as an artist.

The environs of Enkhuizen did not, any more than did those of Amsterdam, offer scenes of surpassing beauty. Flat fields, monotonous canals, and poor clumps of trees were not calculated to fire poetic imaginations in a landscape painter; but these same flat fields were peopled with a tribe of robust cattle whose rich brown and golden tints contrasted favorably with the surrounding verdure. That the young Paul conceived at first hand a desire to become the portrayer of these scenes is evident, for he owed it neither to his forerunners nor, in any great degree, to his own father, from whom he only learned the actual technique of his art. He threw himself into his self-allotted task with ardor, and many a careful study he made of ox, cow, horse, sheep, goat, and pig, thus becoming acquainted with their habits and customs, the textures of their coats and the formation of their frames, as well as with the trees and plants by which they were surrounded. So accurately did he study their forms that a writer on the natural history of Holland, writing between 1769 and 1779, did not hesitate to illustrate his work from paintings and sketches by Potter, including geometrical drawings made to demonstrate the proper proportions of cattle.

An etching by Potter of a 'Herdsmen,' bearing date 1643, proves that the lad had acquired considerable proficiency as a draughtsman at the early age of eighteen, although as a painter he was but timid, owing to his inability to express the desired effect without painting all he saw. With experience his touch became firmer, and he developed into a bold painter; but,

The Art of Paul Potter

CHARLES BLANC

'HISTOIRE DES PEINTRES'

"SOME Dutch painters," wrote the Abbé de Lamennais, "have been able to lend the nature they depicted an indefinable accent which touches, moves, and begets reverie. By what mysterious magic do they thus hold us absorbed for hours together in contemplation of subjects which seem most commonplace in nature?—a meadow with a brook flowing through it and a few aged willow trees, a valley traversed by a storm-swelled torrent, the rain-clouds just clearing from a sky lit by the setting sun, a cabin niched at the foot of a naked rock on some deserted strand, beyond which surges the storm-shaken sea, a distant sail bending under the stress of wind. The mysterious magic which can transmute such simple scenes as these is the imagination of the artist, which, communicating itself to you, wakes an answering emotion in your breast. It is, in a word, Art, bearing you upon its puissant wings above the sway of the mere communicating senses. It was because he himself had come to recognize it, that, under the exterior forms of the animals Paul Potter painted, we can discern the individuality of each beast, the manifestation of its characteristic and typical nature."

One hundred years ago such an appreciation as this would not have been understood, or, rather, such ideas would have occurred to no one. The art-lovers of his own day saw in Paul Potter no more than a faithful copyist of nature, truthful even to naïveté, and extremely skilful in rendering what he had cunningly observed. It was reserved for our century to discover the subtler meaning; to recognize in the animals of Potter, as in the landscapes of Ruysdael, I do not know what vague, elusive sentiment.

Every living creature that has received our common gift of life, breathes our common air, and is warmed by our common sun, should, of right, interest us; but between ourselves and these inferior beings we need an interpreter,—some simple soul who, because of his very simplicity, can approach closer to them than we, and by his genius show us their individualities and the differences between them. In a word, a poet or a great painter is needed to thus become spokesman for the dumb and neglected world that lies but one degree beneath man's level, to understand its hidden idioms, and to so translate them that our minds or hearts can read them. We need a Bernardin de Saint Pierre to reveal to us the secret harmonies of nature; a Ruysdael to move us by the sight of a stormy sky and the shudder of great trees tortured by the gale; a Paul Potter to make audible to our grosser ears the voice of common nature in the plaint of lambs and the lowing of kine.

There is no country more favorable as a field for the painter of animals than Holland; none more fruitful in beautiful and picture-making models. The humidity of the climate makes the land one great fertile grazing-ground of tender green, over which wander numberless flocks and herds, the colors of their hides and skins, mottled with contrasting and harmonious tones,

showing vivid and warm against the verdant background. In no other land are the colors of the cattle so rich and various. It seems as if nature, in this level country, overshadowed by a sky which is almost always sad and gray, had thus in a measure compensated for the monotony of the land itself. Potter had to do no more than to stray about the environs of The Hague to find models ready made to his hand; and apparently the first which met his eye seemed to him beautiful enough to paint, could he but faithfully copy them in the simplicity of their noonday repose.

An ardent devotee of his art, he seems never to have gone abroad without a sketch-book in which he jotted down the outlines of every object which struck his attention,—tree, weed, fence, hedge, or shepherd. As for the animals themselves, although he did not commonly seek to portray their more active movements, as did Berghem, he drew them with the most scrupulous care and in all imaginable attitudes, from simple profile to most difficult foreshortenings. He was fond of drawing cows at such a view as should contrast their rounded outlines with the characteristic square projection of their hip-bones, and added the figures of sheep and goats to his groups of cattle that he might gain an agreeable contrast of outlines; though it was his liking to make some cow or some great motionless bull raising his horned head above the herd—the stupid king of the pasture—the dominant figure. What intelligent attention, what patience, what love, he brought to the rendering of the least details! None, howsoever minute, escaped him, down to the individual bend of each horn, the various shapes of the ears, and the movement of the eyelids, upon which the degree of kindliness or fierceness of expression depends.

These beautiful sketches, fully finished and most exact in drawing, were however merely studies for compositions; though Potter conceived a “composition” so simply that he had often but to add a background to his sketch to transform it into a picture. In his studio at home he diligently continued the work. He introduced into the foreground some large plants, also studied from nature, and completed his composition by adding perhaps an old knotted and bent willow trunk, transferred direct from note-book to picture, or a small house or shed, copied faithfully in its least details down to the cracks in the wall or the smoke from the roof. Thus, in a studio full of visitors, and amid the noise of conversation, he finished the many charming works which for over two hundred years have held places of honor in the greatest galleries, a delight to the amateurs who have owned them, which have made the reputation of the engravers who have reproduced them, and the fortunes of the dealers who have bought them to sell again and again, and always at increased prices.

There is a pretty wood which lies adjacent to the city of The Hague, in which the Prince of Orange built a little pleasure-palace called “The House in the Wood.” This was one of Paul Potter’s favorite haunts. He has depicted scenes from it in many of his pictures—some of these, indeed, contrary to his usual habit, being almost pure landscapes, in which the animals and figures are but accessories. In general, however, Potter’s backgrounds

are the least excellent parts in his pictures; and many critics have taken a malicious pleasure in pointing out their monotony. But to reproach one who was primarily a painter of animals with such a shortcoming seems unjust. True, Potter had not the spiritedness and imagination of Berghem, and did not, like the latter, illuminate his landscapes by capricious and shifting beams of sunlight, nor make them picturesque with the romantic ruins of ancient castles; but on the other hand he was more natural, and more truly Dutch. Brought up amid these monotonous prairies, which he never quitted to travel abroad, Potter made no attempt to borrow from Italy that warm lighting which vivifies so many of Berghem's noble landscapes. He painted only what he knew,—the gray, heavy skies and the flat sweep of the Dutch plains; and these he reproduced faithfully, adding nothing, attempting neither to embellish them nor to charge them with meaning.

Moreover, nothing better suited his chosen subjects than this type of natural scene. The somber sky served as an admirable foil to relieve the creamy fleeces and variegated coats of the animals which took first place in his compositions. Indeed, it seems as if through fear of a divided interest, or to weld the whole into a closer unity, he sometimes intentionally slighted his landscape backgrounds. At any rate, they often possess less interest than they would have in nature; and as to foreground, he frequently contented himself with adding a thistle or two, a dead branch, and a few field flowers. With Berghem, the whole landscape is in movement; it shines and changes and is as animated as are the animals it enframes; but with Potter the landscape is a secondary consideration; he sacrificed all the rest of nature for the benefit of his herd.

Sunlight is not always, nay, not even usually, absent from his pictures. He preferred to lay his scene in that time of day (no fanciful or uncommon hour indeed, for there was no fantasy in his nature) when the sun is wont to first show itself in Holland. Covered with clouds during the morning, it does not usually shine out until about four in the afternoon, after which it illumines the land until sundown. At this hour the light comes from just above the horizon and rakes the plains in long beams, enlivening each object, throwing it into relief by a long shadow, and warming and enriching the colors of the animals. The sky is still overcast and gray, a neutral expanse which serves to enhance the foreground, unless, by chance, an occasional lowering cloud catches the light. For fear that even such a dull overhead sky should divert the attention which he wished to have centered upon his animals, Potter, with notable exceptions, painted it rather thickly, sometimes almost "woollily," rather than to allow it to detract in the least from the vivid hides of his bulls, the soft fleece of his sheep, and the shining skins of his goats.

In 1652, for some reason, Paul Potter quitted The Hague for Amsterdam, which was then the residence of the greatest painters of Holland, and apparently the sight of their splendid achievements made a deep impression on him. At any rate, it is certain that he made at least one attempt to enlarge his man-

ner, to use canvases of larger proportions—in a word, to elevate his charming pastorals to the rank of historical paintings. This was doubly an error. Cattle shown at life-size in a picture cannot interest us; they cannot possibly support the comparison with nature itself. To make such colossal dimensions tolerable we require some subject of special charm and poetry which admits of strange effects of light and of dramatic interest. Potter forgot that if a picture but two or three feet square could exercise its full charm it would be fatal to enlarge it to five or six times that area, and his great 'Bull' does not deserve the immense celebrity which it has acquired. The eye is shocked by the unnecessary and unlooked-for dimensions; and his precise manner, admirable in smaller works, seems here insufficient and cold.

But if he did not succeed in paintings upon so large a scale, what energy, sentiment, and perfection we find in Potter's works of smaller dimensions which were better suited to the simplicity of his subjects and which display to highest advantage all the delicate precision of his brush, and—dare I say?—all his emotional tenderness. Surely there is no one who, seeing these pictures, which for two hundred years have been telling us, in paint and color, the story of these dumb patient servants of mankind—surely there is none, I say, who has not admired, and been struck at first glance by their exact truth and their simplicity. But, on the other hand, how many have stood before them without seeing anything more; without experiencing any other emotion than mere admiring wonder; without, in a word, understanding the underlying sentiment that abides in them. Yet, for my own part, I have no hesitation in saying that to me the poetry of genius is as present in these peaceful compositions as in the larger works wherein others have depicted the achievements of heroes.

One distinguished appreciator has said of Paul Potter's animals: "Other artists have painted cows, cattle and sheep, drawn and colored them well, but he alone seems to have seized their expressions, their instincts, their individualities—in a word, what serves them as a soul." We admire the flocks of Berghem, Van de Velde, and Karel Dujardin, but those of Paul Potter move us. Should we rank the painters of Holland purely according to their picturesque or picture-making achievements we could not set Potter among the first; but within his own domain he is the master of them all. None other came so close to truth. Not only did he know his animals thoroughly in their anatomies, their habits, and their instincts, but none other ever so exactly observed and recognized those exterior appearances which their characters impress upon them, or the various movements and postures which betray the agitation or calm of their simple natures. How vividly he makes us feel the strength and construction of his great bulls! Yet he never obtains this effect of solidity and mass at the expense of fine detail. With the exception of the sky and background he sacrificed nothing which might for a moment retain the curiosity or attention. The star-shaped spot where the hair parts on the forehead of the cow, how it grows about the beginning of the horns, how it lies sleek upon the dewlaps and with what a different sleek-

ness it lies along the shoulder, how it bristles along the backbone, how it is disordered where the animal has licked itself, or upon the belly where it has lain, or where it has scratched itself against a tree,—such least accidents of coat or hide are expressed with scrupulous accuracy. The wool of the sheep, the fine fleece of the young lamb, are rendered by different handlings of the brush. He does not even forget to paint the bits of stick and wisps of straw which cling to the haunches of the sheep that has been lying down in the farm-yard. In a word, to that exactness of ensemble which characterizes the race he added those exact details of expression or habit which give character to each individual beast; and because of this he stands easily preëminent among all the painters of *animals*.

It sometimes seems as if the love of natural life were strongest in those who are predestined to an early death. Like Van de Velde, who loved his land so greatly, Potter bore in his breast the germs of a premature death. It is said that he wore out his health in excessive toil, working, indeed, as his biographer writes, “without rest all day and by the lamp far into the night.” He spent the long winter evenings in etching the studies which had served their purpose for his paintings; and never went about without his sketch-book. But this continued application, of which his family and friends complained, and which they regarded as the cause of his death, was demanded of him by an imperious urging of his nature. It would almost appear as though certain foredoomed beings had some undefined warning which drove them to devour the hours allotted to them in desperate haste to accomplish their task before it shall be cut short—to crowd the whole of life into a half. It was thus with this great painter of the humble herds and fields. Paul Potter died before attaining his thirtieth year. Two centuries have elapsed, yet his pictures have, year by year, steadily increased in value; even poor, worn copies of his etchings fetch remarkable sums. It is right that his works should be thus prized; for in the least of them we may trace the qualities that made Paul Potter great,—his profound knowledge, his love for exact truth, his search for accuracy of line even at the risk of hardness, his naïveté, his sentiment, nay, even something of his tenderness. . . .

The beasts of the fields of Holland have given Paul Potter an immortal name; and he in his turn has taken them under the protection of his genius. Never before did animals occupy the first place in the creations of a painter, nor serve as the main subjects of a picture. Since the time of the Renaissance at least no one had dared to import them with such authority into art. Yet it is by right that they enlist the services of the greatest geniuses. There is a profound truth, as yet not fully recognized, in the words of Michelet: “The tree which has weathered all seasons, the bird which has looked down upon all lands, have we nothing to learn from them? Does not the eagle read what we cannot in the sun, and the owl in the night darkness? And the solemn kine, so passive under the shade of the great oak, is there no thought in those long reveries of theirs?”—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH

F. T. KUGLER

'HANDBOOK OF PAINTING'

OF the masters who have striven preëminently after truth, Paul Potter is, beyond all question, one of the greatest that ever lived. He acquired a correctness of drawing, a kind of modeling which imparts an almost plastic effect to his animals, an extraordinary execution of detail in the most solid *impastos*, and a truth of coloring which harmonizes astonishingly with the hour of the day. In his landscapes, which generally consist of a few willows in the foreground and of a wide view over meadows, the most delicate gradation of *aërial perspective* is seen. But there was very little poetry in his soul. He was an excellent craftsman, but cannot be ranked high as an *artist*.

ARSÈNE ALEXANDRE

'HISTOIRE POPULAIRE DE LA PEINTURE'

THE Dutch masters of the seventeenth century lavished all their genius upon the simple things of the earth,—those men or animals which serve her mutely and ingloriously, yet not without a high though silent mission. The painters of Holland loved these simple subjects so intensely that they gave them *grandeur* through simplicity, and style through careful and detailed attention. Among them all, Paul Potter best exemplifies this intensity of attention focused upon a limited field. There is something of the same pathos in his achievement that there is in that of Ruysdael. Potter, the stricken consumptive, loved the fields and the beasts of the fields as deeply and touchingly as the poverty-stricken Ruysdael loved the ungrateful dunes, the ruined cemeteries, and the wind-shaken seas of his native land.

The great, flat, verdant plains of Holland commence at the end of each village street, and stretch away under an unchanging sky to the horizon, only dotted here and there with groups of animals, black, white, and red, that move so leisurely as to seem almost motionless. Occasionally we catch sight of a splendid black-and-white spotted cow, which, having considered the pro and con of the question, bends her knees and slowly sinks down upon her flank; but we may be sure that she will rest there immovable quite long enough for Paul Potter to sketch her. At the horizon the plain is bordered by a line of trees so picturesque in outline that the greatest "composer" would hesitate to change it, their darker verdure contrasting with the fresh green of the grass. The sun, veiled by thin gray clouds, sheds its pallid rays in fanlike beams upon the plain. Such is the country that Paul Potter painted, or, if you like the expression better, imitated; for his exquisite care for detail, the quality which has displeased many critics of his celebrated 'Bull' at The Hague, seems to me the very reason of his artistic being, the key to his genius.

These critics say that this picture is an almost puerile piece of deception, depicted hair by hair, and flock of wool by flock of wool. One of the primitive jeweler-painters could not have chiseled the frog more exactly, or better imitated the tufts of herb, the bark of the tree, the horns of the ram, the wet pink muzzles of the sheep, or the beard of the cowherd. All is executed with the patience of a jeweler, careful, detailed, and loving, not only in those parts of the picture which are in the immediate foreground, but even to the

least objects of the distance. The woodpecker in the sky, the farm hidden among the trees, and all the far-lying plain are executed with the same fine precision.

If, however, one took account of these details only one would not understand the picture at all; but, on the other hand, if one did not take account of them one would lose still more. To completely understand the work it is needful both to feel and to forget them; for the picture attains its extreme and moving force only through its extreme care in detail.

The pale and consumptive youth, evidently predestined to a premature grave, whose portrait Van der Helst has given us, is he who accomplished this robust work. Though he labored constantly and ardently, he seems to have felt none of that restless fever which has urged so many other stricken geniuses frantically to crowd each moment of their lives because it is to be so brief. On the contrary, Paul Potter worked slowly, patiently, and tenderly. To his loving eye the plains of Holland discovered all the hidden treasures of their deceptive monotony; and detail by detail, with such infinite patience as you may see exhibited in the primitive pictures of St. Luke depicting the Virgin, his patient pencil traced, line by line, the great portrait of Fecundity.

—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH

PAUL CHÉRON

'GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS': 1875

CONSCIENCE, sincerity, true solidity, at the expense of brilliancy and cleverness—these are the dominant qualities of Potter's talent. Who ever better rendered the sharp bony hips of cows, the barrel-like swell of their bellies, or the placid, wondering vacuity of their expressions? He seems never to have striven after the tricky effects and dexterities of mere execution. His manner was uniform, monotonous, sometimes indeed heavy; but closer examination discovers fundamental seriousness, perfect naturalness, quick and thorough comprehension, and conscientious patience. He supplemented the greatest exactness of observation by the sincerest painstaking labor.—FROM THE FRENCH

A. VON WURZBACH

'PAULUS POTTER'

PAUL POTTER painted repeatedly the flat Dutch plain across which in the far distance is seen a little farm and occasionally the steeple of a church. Sometimes he chose a forest as a background, and painted the trees in a peculiar emerald-green hue in which the lack of light and shade is even more striking than in the flat plains. It should be remembered, however, that Potter did not attempt to expend his strength upon the painting of any landscape, but concentrated all his powers upon the psychological representation of animals; and in this respect he is incomparable. He understood the character of the bull, the sheep, and the pig, and interpreted it with a truth and fidelity to nature that has scarcely been equaled by the greatest portraitists in their rendering of the human physiognomy.

The frequent repetition of his motives and groups, however, betrays the same poverty of invention that is noticeable in his landscapes; but this failing becomes apparent only upon close study of his works, and then only when he is compared—and he can justly claim such comparison—with the inexhaustible genius of a Rubens, a Rembrandt, a Jan Steen, and an Ostade.—

FROM THE GERMAN

JOHN C. VAN DYKE

‘PAUL POTTER’

PAUL POTTER was an inspiration rather than a consummation. He could draw a cow, a tree, a rock, a leaf, with harsh exactness, and he could paint them with a rasping, wiry brush; but he could not put them together and make a picture of them. He did not understand subordination, atmosphere, values, or picture planes. His compositions begin anywhere, and ramble indefinitely so long as there is canvas; they are illuminated by a light that comes from no point in particular; and their coloring is lacking in unity, depth, richness, and transparency. This was the result of an insufficient education, which he was striving to better with unwearying patience and industry when his life was suddenly cut short. What he might have done had he been spared can hardly be considered; what he achieved under adverse circumstances, together with the noble patience and candid spirit of his achievement, cannot be too highly praised. If we regard his work as the study of a young man devoted to the realistic portrayal of character in landscape and cattle, we shall find much to admire; if we regard his work as final pictorial accomplishment, we shall not escape disappointment.

ÉMILE MONTÉGUT

‘LES PAYS-BAS’

THE best judgment that I have ever heard or read upon Paul Potter was given to me in speaking of his famous ‘Young Bull,’ by a pastor of a church in Rotterdam. My impressions of the picture are so exactly in accord with this judgment that I cannot do better than to transcribe it here, as nearly word for word as I can remember.

“To my thinking,” said this gentleman, “Paul Potter’s great ‘Bull’ is one of the finest works that Dutch painting has created. In it Potter has done more than produce a fine painting of a number of animals; indeed he has written the true idyl of Holland. He has expressed the deep, attentive, delicate, almost maternal affection of the Dutch peasant for his beasts.”

“An idyl of Holland,” that is what Paul Potter’s work is, and therein lies its greatness. My friend was right, and his judgment will be confirmed by any attentive spectator of the picture. Potter attempted to sum up in it, and *has* summed up, indeed, the poetry of the agricultural life which holds so large a place in the economic history of the Dutch people, and to which the greater part in the development of their prosperity is due. At the time when he painted the ‘Bull’ this agricultural life was at its height. Dutch energy and ingeniousness were concentrated upon agriculture. Referring to dates, I find that it was painted about 1646 or 1647; that is to say, before the

Peace of Westphalia and just before the famous Congress of Münster, which Ter Borch has depicted in his celebrated work of that name. In other words, the 'Bull' was painted just before the time when Holland was to display that remarkable revival of activity which continued for more than three-quarters of the century and made her the leader of central Europe in trade. In this memorable work, then, Paul Potter expressed what was, at the moment, the principal life, spirit, and activity of his land.

Rembrandt in the 'Night Watch' did for the civil life of Holland what Paul Potter did in the 'Bull' for its rustic life; and both pictures are, despite their appearance of vulgar reality, works of the highest patriotic importance. What Rembrandt expressed in the 'Night Watch' was the ecstasy of liberty, the burning fervor of men still in the honeymoon of independence. What Paul Potter expressed in the 'Bull' is the happiness, less fervid but still deeper seated, which the freeholder of the soil, the man without the badge of servitude, experiences in seeing crops spring and flourish through his efforts, and flocks and herds multiply under his care. In these two works, then, is set forth the whole life of the little Republic; each complements and supplements the other.—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH

M. F. REISET

'GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS': 1878

PAUL POTTER took account of every detail. He left nothing to chance, and seems to have consulted and keenly observed the nature before him for each stroke of his brush. Nor was he content when he had attained exactness of exterior form. He seems even to have tried to catch the character, if I may so express myself, of each animal he painted. If, as an eminent artist has said, "drawing is the honesty of art," Potter was one of the most upright of artists, for none ever drew with greater precision, conscientiousness, or success.—FROM THE FRENCH

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN

'LES MAÎTRES D'AUTREFOIS'

THE Anatomy Lesson,' the 'Night Watch,' and Paul Potter's 'Young Bull' are the most celebrated things in Holland. To the last the Gallery of The Hague owes a great part of the interest it inspires.

'The Young Bull' is not priced. Estimating it according to the present value of the artist's other works, there is no doubt that in a European auction it would fetch a fabulous sum. Then is it a beautiful picture? By no means. Does it deserve the importance attached to it? Incontestably. Then is Paul Potter a very great painter? Very great. Does it follow that he really does paint as well as is commonly supposed? Not exactly. That is a misapprehension that it will be well to dissipate.

On the day when this imaginary auction of which I speak opened, and consequently when every one had the right to discuss freely the merits of this famous work, if any one had dared to let the truth be heard he would have spoken very nearly as follows: "The reputation of the picture is greatly exaggerated and at the same time perfectly legitimate. It is erroneously con-

sidered an incomparable specimen of painting. People think it is an example to be followed, a model to be copied, one in which ignorant generations may learn the technical secrets of their art. In that again they deceive themselves entirely. The work is ugly and ill-conceived, and the painting is monotonous, thick, heavy, dull, and dry. The arrangement is poor. Unity is lacking in the composition, which begins no one knows where, does not end anywhere, receives light without being illuminated, escapes on every side and runs out of the frame—so exactly like flowered chintz does the picture seem to be painted. The space is too crowded without being occupied. Neither the lines, nor the color, nor the distribution of the effects, give it even those first conditions of existence which are essential to any fairly well-arranged work. The animals are ridiculous in their size. The painting of the fawn-colored cow with the white head is very hard. The ewe and the ram seem modeled in plaster. As for the cowherd, nothing can be said in defense of him. Only two portions of this picture seem to be intended for our notice,—the wide expanse of sky and the enormous bull. The cloud is well in place and is lighted where it should be; it is also properly tinted according to the demands of the principal object, its purpose being to serve as a relief to the bull. With a wise understanding of the law of contrasts the painter has beautifully graded the light tints and the deeper shadings of the animal, and has opposed the darkest parts to the light portion of the sky. But this is hardly a merit, considering the simplicity of the problem. The rest is merely a surplus that might be cut away without regret, and indeed to the great advantage of the picture.” This would be a brutal criticism but an exact one. And yet public opinion, less punctilious or more clear-sighted, would say that the signature was well worth the price.

Public opinion never goes entirely astray. By uncertain roads, often by those not most happily chosen, it arrives definitely at the expression of a true sentiment. The reasons given are not always good, but there are always other reasons that justify the expression. It is deceived regarding qualities, sometimes mistaking faults for excellences; it estimates a man for his manner—in reality the least of all his merits; it believes that a painter paints well merely because he paints minutely. What is astonishing in Paul Potter is the imitation of objects carried to the point of eccentricity. People do not know, or do not notice, that in such a case the soul of the painter is of more worth than the work, and that his manner of feeling is of infinitely greater importance than the result.

When he painted the ‘Young Bull’ in 1647, Paul Potter was not twenty-three years of age. He was a very young man; to judge by the average young man of twenty-two years, a child. To what school did he belong? To none. Had he any masters? We know of no other teachers than his father, Pieter Simonsz Potter, an obscure painter, and Jacob de Weth, of Haarlem, who had no force to influence a pupil either for good or evil. Paul Potter then found around his cradle, and afterwards in the studio of his second master, nothing but the most rudimentary instruction. Strange to say, the pupil needed nothing more. The greater part of his life was passed in the focus

of the most active, the most inspiring, and the richest art that the world had ever known, except during the preceding century in Italy. Masters were not lacking; the choice was only too embarrassing. The greatest of all, the most illustrious, Rembrandt, had already produced the 'Night Watch.'

But what of Paul Potter? How did he isolate himself in the heart of this rich and swarming school, where practical ability was great, talent universal, styles somewhat similar, and yet the methods of feeling very individual? Had he any fellow-pupils? We do not hear of them. His friends are unknown. It is the utmost we can do to be sure of the exact year of his birth. He reveals himself early, signing a charming etching at fourteen; at twenty-two he is ignorant on many points, but on others his maturity is unexampled. He labored and produced work upon work, doing some things admirably. He accumulated them in a few years in haste and abundance, as if death were at his heels, and yet with an application and a patience which render this prodigious labor miraculous. He married young for any one else, but late for him, for it was on July 3, 1650; and in January, 1654, less than four years afterwards, death seized him in the height of his glory, just before he had completely mastered his craft.

What could be simpler, shorter, and more definite? Genius and no lessons, an ingenuous yet cunning method, attentive observation, and reflection. Add to these natural charm, the gentleness of a meditative mind, the application of a scrupulous conscience, the sadness inseparable from solitary labor, and, perhaps, the melancholy belonging to sickly beings, and you have very nearly all of Paul Potter. The great 'Bull' at The Hague represents his qualities excellently with one exception—that of his charm. It is a great *study*, too great from the common-sense point of view, not too great for the research of which it was the object, nor for the instruction that the painter drew from it.

Remember that Paul Potter, compared with his brilliant contemporaries, was ignorant of all the expedients of his handicraft. I do not mean, of course, the tricks of which his frankness can never be suspected. He devoted special study to forms and aspects in their absolute simplicity. The least artifice was an embarrassment which would have spoiled him because it would have altered his clear view of things. A great bull in a vast plain, a far-reaching sky, and no horizon,—what better opportunity could there be for a student to learn once for all a host of very difficult things, and to know them by rule and measure? The action is perfectly simple—he did not fail with it; the movement is true, and the head admirably full of life. The beast shows his age, his type, his character, his disposition, his length, his height, his joints, his bones, his muscles; his hair is rough or smooth, in flocks or curls, his hide is loose or stretched—all is perfection. The head, the eye, the neck and shoulders, the chest, from the point of view of simple yet exact observation, form a very rare specimen, perhaps without an equal. I do not say that the subject is beautiful, nor that the color is well chosen; subject and color are here subordinated too visibly to preoccupations of form for us to exact much on that head when the designer has given us all, or nearly all, under another. Moreover, the tones and the exact depiction of exactly ob-

served details result in rendering nature as she really is, in relief, gradation, power—almost even in her mysteries. It is not possible to aim at a more circumscribed but more formal result or to attain it with more success. People say “Paul Potter’s Bull,” but that is not enough: they might say “*The Bull*,” and, in my opinion, that would be the greatest eulogium that could be bestowed upon this work, so mediocre in its weak parts and yet so decisive.

Almost all of Paul Potter’s fundamental qualities are exhibited in ‘*The Young Bull*.’ In each work that he undertook he set himself to study some external manifestation of nature or some new branch of his art. His pictures are studies, and only studies, of animals closely examined, grouped without much art, drawn in simple attitudes or in difficult foreshortening, never with an effect that was either very complicated or striking. Many of them are very weak or very strong according to whether they are regarded as an example by a master or as a splendid exercise by a pupil.

The result is often thin, hesitating, sometimes even painfully labored. The touch is immature. Paul Potter’s eye, of most singular exactitude and of a penetration which nothing ever fatigued, scrutinized and studied every detail, never wearying, never stopping. He ignores the art of sacrifice, and has not yet learned that things must sometimes be understood and but half expressed. You feel the urgency of his brush and the hopelessness of the elaborate embroidery-like fashion which he employed to render his compact masses of foliage and thick grasses of the fields.

His work as a painter emanates from his work as an etcher. To the end of his life, even in his most perfect works, he never ceased to paint as if with a burin. The tool becomes more supple, it is true, and lends itself to other uses; but still under the thickest paint you feel the fine point, the sharp-edged notches, and the biting touch. It is only gradually and with effort, by a progressive and entirely personal education, that he learns to manage his palette; but as soon as he succeeds in this he is superior.

Little by little the painter may be seen freeing himself from the draughtsman; his color becomes more decided, his palette more learned, and finally chiaroscuro is born of itself, as if a self-made discovery by this naïve spirit.

The experience that Paul Potter acquired was due to himself alone. He learned from day to day, every day, and let us not forget that the end came before he had done learning. As he had no master, so he had no pupils. His life was indeed too short to permit of any teaching. Moreover, what would he have taught? His manner of drawing? That is an art which can hardly be taught. Arrangement and the knowledge of effect? He was scarcely sure of these even in his last days. Chiaroscuro? It was taught in all the studios of Amsterdam much better than he practised it himself: it was, indeed, the one thing that the sight of the plains of Holland had only revealed to him towards the end of his life, and then but occasionally. The art of composing a palette? It is evident how much trouble he had to become master of his own. As to all academic expedients, his works themselves give evidence how little knowledge he had of these.

Paul Potter painted fine pictures which were not always fine models; or rather, he set many good examples, and his whole life was but a piece of excellent advice. More than that of any painter of that honest school, his work breathes simplicity, patience, circumspection, and persevering love of truth. These precepts were perhaps the only ones that he had received; certainly they were the only ones that he could transmit. All his originality came from them, and his greatness also.

With a love for the country, a soul that was open, tranquil, and serene, a profound yet healthy sensibility, a sense of proportion, a liking for things clearly defined, of proper balance of forms, and possessed of an instinct for anatomy, he was a constructor of the first order, an exemplar of that virtue which has been called the honesty of talent.

His natural bent was for drawing, but such was his desire after perfection that he set himself the aim of becoming a great painter, and had already succeeded in painting excellently. He divided his labor among the various branches of his art with an unusual equanimity. To judge by the portraits of his sad and suffering face, he was of an exquisite nature. Such was this young man, unique in his time, and who will always be unique. Such was he from his earliest gropings to his latest and greatest works.—FROM THE FRENCH

The Works of Paul Potter

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

‘THE YOUNG BULL’

PLATES I AND II

PAUL POTTER’S ‘Young Bull’ in the Gallery of The Hague was painted in 1647, when the artist was twenty-two years old. The picture measures eight feet six inches high by nine feet ten inches wide, and is popularly considered his masterpiece, though many critics rank it as inferior to some of his other and smaller productions. In spite, however, of its manifest faults as a work of art, it may justly be regarded as the most complete and conclusive representation of a bull that has ever been painted. The animal is life-size, reddish-brown in color, with white on back and forehead. Although not lacking in breadth of treatment, the work is marvelously minute in point of execution. Each single hair upon the creature’s head, about which the flies are buzzing, is painted with exactness, and the bark and foliage of the tree, the toad on the ground, even the grass, herbs, and pebbles are all faithfully and minutely rendered. The other animals cannot be said to add to the interest of the picture, nor is the figure of the cowherd without serious faults.

“The supreme merit of Paul Potter’s ‘Young Bull,’” writes De Amicis, “may be expressed in one word: it is *alive*. The serious, wondering eye, which gives the impression of vigorous vitality and savage pride, is painted with such truth that, at the first sight, one feels inclined to dodge to the right

or left, as one does in a country road when one meets such animals. The moist black nostrils seem to be smoking and drawing in the air with a prolonged breath. . . .

"Infinite criticisms have been made on this 'incredible stroke of audacity by a young man of twenty-two.' The large size of the canvas has been censured, the commonplace nature of the subject, the poverty of the light effects—for the light is equally diffused and everything is placed in relief without the contrast of shadow—the stiffness of the legs of the bull, the crude coloring of the other animals, the mediocrity of the cowherd's figure; but, for all this, Paul Potter's 'Bull' is one of the noblest examples of art, and the greatest work of the prince of animal-painters."

'ANIMALS IN A PASTURE'

PLATE III

THE Dresden Gallery possesses two small companion pictures by Paul Potter, one of which is here reproduced. It bears the signature of the artist and the date 1652. It is a scene characteristic of Potter, and is made attractive by his usual simplicity and fidelity to nature. The pigment was laid on so thinly that the wooden panel on which the picture was painted shows through in places.

'DAIRY-FARM NEAR THE HAGUE'

PLATE IV

ONE of the finest of Paul Potter's works in England is the picture in the Duke of Westminster's collection, London, dated 1647. It measures one foot three and five-eighths inches high by one foot seven and three-quarters inches wide. The scene represents a dairy-farm between The Hague and the village of Geestbrug. The château in the distance is that of Binkhorst, which is still standing. The whole picture is bathed in the glowing warmth of the afternoon sun, which, although near setting, is still bright enough to emphasize the lengthened shadows cast by the trees and the animals.

"Full of truth, most effective, and of an admirable unity and softness of tone," writes M. Reiset, "this celebrated picture is beyond all praise."

'THE WOLFHOUND'

PLATE V

THIS picture of a wolfhound, painted in a vigorous and masterly manner, is in the Hermitage Gallery, St. Petersburg. The figure of the dog is life-size; his hide is shaggy and of a yellowish tan color in the body and dark gray about the head. The landscape background represents a flat plain of Holland divided by a canal. Over the entrance to the kennel to which the dog is chained is the signature of the artist, with the date 1650.

'HORSES AT THE DOOR OF A COTTAGE'

PLATE VI

THIS unusually beautiful picture by Paul Potter, now in the Louvre, Paris, is dated 1647, the same year in which he painted the great 'Bull.'

Fromentin has thus described it: "It is evening, and the two farm-horses, the one a bay and the other white, have finished their day's work. Unhitched

from the cart but still harnessed, they stand before an empty trough, the white horse hanging his head with weariness. From the river below the carter is bringing a bucket full of water, his figure relieved in soft outline against a sky aglow with the setting sun. The picture is a *work* in the highest and rarest meaning of the term. It is unique in sentiment and design, in mystery of effect, in beauty of tone, and in poetic quality."

'A BULL AND TWO COWS'

PLATE VII

"THIS picture in Buckingham palace," writes Kugler, "combines with Paul Potter's usual fidelity to nature a more than common power of effect, great breadth, and freedom of treatment."

A young bull, standing near the trunk of a tree, faces the spectator, his restless, impatient bearing in marked contrast to the calm serenity of his two companions. Low trees and sandy hills are seen in the distance. The picture is dated 1649.

'THE COW REFLECTED IN THE STREAM'

PLATE VIII

THIS work at The Hague is ranked as one of Paul Potter's greatest achievements. Bürger calls it "a picture of the highest quality, a real masterpiece," and Kugler draws our attention to the "exquisite freshness and charm with which the summer morning is represented, the picturesqueness of the composition as a whole, the attraction of its separate motives, and the wonderful precision of touch and execution." In his earlier works Potter's landscapes were often shown under a hard, dry, strong light, and later he erred in an opposite direction, that is, in the dullness and leaden quality of his illumination; but at his best, as here, the light is warm yet soft and clear, and the whole work extremely limpid and beautiful in its effect. The picture, which measures but one foot four inches by one foot nine inches, was painted about 1648.

'LANDSCAPE WITH CATTLE'

PLATE IX

THIS picture, now in the National Gallery, London, was painted in 1651, three years before Paul Potter's death. It shows us a meadow with farm buildings overshadowed by trees, cows, horses, sheep, a dog, and two men unloading a cart near the open door of a shed. In the background is a hilly corn-field stacked with cut sheaves of wheat. The time is evening. The scene is warmly lighted by the low rays of the setting sun, and the sky is treated with more interest than is usual in this artist's work. The picture, exquisitely finished throughout, is but one foot ten inches high by one foot eight inches wide.

'THE YOUNG THIEF'

PLATE X

ON rare occasions, as in this picture in Buckingham Palace, London, Potter attempted to make an incident his subject, and in this instance he has attempted to be mildly humorous. From the stable on the left runs a

boy, the "young thief," carrying a puppy, the mother of which is attacking him and has caught him by the coat. The dairy-maid, who, with her back to the spectator, is milking the cow, turns her head to laugh at the lad's plight. It is, however, in spite of this incidental and story-telling interest, and because of its faithful delineation of the forms of the animals, the soft light, and the landscape, that this picture deserves to be ranked among Potter's most successful achievements.

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL PAINTINGS BY PAUL POTTER, WITH THEIR
PRESENT LOCATIONS

AUSTRIA. VIENNA, IMPERIAL GALLERY: Landscape and Cattle; The Flock—VIENNA, CZERNIN COLLECTION: Herd of Cattle—VIENNA, HARRACH COLLECTION: Cattle—BELGIUM. BRUSSELS MUSEUM: Two Pigs—BRUSSELS, ARENBERG COLLECTION: Repose by the Grange—DENMARK. COPENHAGEN GALLERY: Cows on a Hill; Cows in a Meadow—COPENHAGEN, COLLECTION OF COUNT MOLTKE: Landscape with Cows and Pigs—ENGLAND. BASILDON PARK, COLLECTION OF CHARLES MORRISON, ESQ: Landscape with Cattle—BEARWOOD, COLLECTION OF J. WALTER, ESQ: Two Cows and a Bull—DEEPDENE, HOPE COLLECTION: The Stable Door; Landscape with Cattle; Landscape with Cows—HEYTESBURY, COLLECTION OF COLONEL EVERETT: Landscape with Cattle—LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY: Landscape with Cattle (Plate ix); The Old Gray Hunter—LONDON, APSLEY HOUSE: Deer in a Wood—LONDON, BATH HOUSE: Two Oxen; Cows and Bull—LONDON, DUKE OF BEDFORD'S COLLECTION: Cattle in a Landscape; A Hawking-party—LONDON, BRIDGEWATER HOUSE: Cattle in a Meadow—LONDON, BUCKINGHAM PALACE: Bull and Cows (Plate vii); The Halt; The Young Thief (Plate x); Three Cows in a Field; Two Pigs—LONDON, DORCHESTER HOUSE: The Rabbit-warren—LONDON, GROSVENOR HOUSE, DUKE OF WESTMINSTER'S COLLECTION: Dairy-farm near The Hague (Plate iv); Landscape—LONDON, EARL OF KILMOREY'S COLLECTION: Cavaliers and Cattle—LONDON, COLLECTION OF ALFRED DE ROTHSCHILD, ESQ: The Water-mill—LONDON, WALLACE COLLECTION: Landscape; Herdsmen with Cattle; The Milkmaid; Cattle in Stormy Weather—SOMERLEY, EARL OF NORMANTON'S COLLECTION: Three Cows—STRATTON, HAMPSHIRE, EARL OF NORTHBROOK'S COLLECTION: A Young Bull—SWINTON PARK, COLLECTION OF S. CUNLIFFE-LISTER, ESQ: A Dairy-farm—FRANCE. MONTPPELLIER MUSEUM: Cattle in a Meadow—PARIS, LOUVRE: Horses at the Door of a Cottage (Plate vi); The Meadow; The White Horse; The Wood by The Hague—GERMANY. BERLIN GALLERY: Departure for the Hunt in the Wood by The Hague; Cattle Resting—CASSEL GALLERY: On the Pasture-land; Herdsman and Cattle—DRESDEN, ROYAL GALLERY: Animals in a Pasture (Plate iii); Herdsman with Cattle—GOTHA GALLERY: Landscape; Cattle in a Meadow; The Farm—HAMBURG, KUNSTHALLE: Horses at the Watering-place—INNSBRUCK, TYROLESE NATIONAL MUSEUM: Landscape with Cattle—MUNICH GALLERY: Landscape with Cattle—SCHWERIN MUSEUM: Two Landscapes; Milking; Halt of the Huntsman—HOLLAND. AMSTERDAM, RYKS MUSEUM: The Bear-hunt; Orpheus; Shepherds and their Flocks; The Shepherd's Hut; Landscape with Cattle; The Little Dog; Horses in a Field; Cows in a Field—AMSTERDAM, SIX COLLECTION: The Dairy-maid; Equestrian Portrait of Diderik Tulp—THE HAGUE GALLERY: The Young Bull (Plates i and ii); The Cow Reflected in the Stream (Plate viii); Cattle in the Meadow—THE HAGUE, STEENGRACHT COLLECTION: Cows in a Meadow—IRELAND. DUBLIN, NATIONAL GALLERY: Head of a Bull—ITALY. ROME, BORGHESSE GALLERY: Landscape and Cattle—TURIN GALLERY: Four Oxen in a Landscape—RUSSIA. ST. PETERSBURG, HERMITAGE GALLERY: The Cow; The Life of a Huntsman; Cows in a Landscape; Ox in a Meadow; The Wolfhound (Plate v); The Halt of the Huntsmen; Landscape; The Stable-boy.

Paul Potter Bibliography

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL BOOKS AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES
DEALING WITH PAUL POTTER

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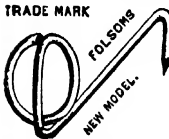
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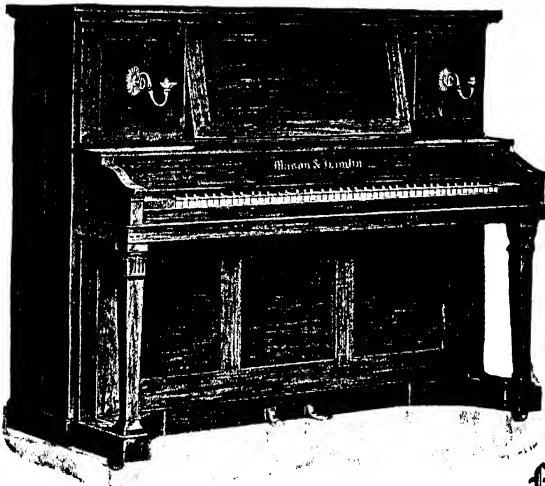
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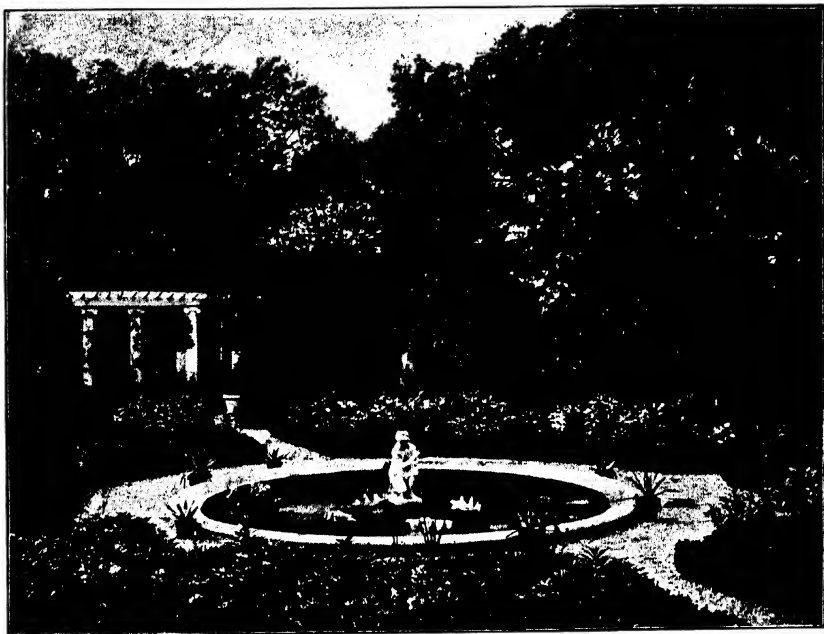
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